

## BOOK REVIEWS.

**A History of Æsthetic.** By BERNARD BOSANQUET, M. A. (Oxon.). London : Swan, Sonnenschein & Co.; New York : Macmillan & Co. Pp. xxiii, 502.

This book, by a well-known scholar and philosopher, offers itself as an attempt to fill, at least in part, a serious gap in the English literature of the History of Philosophy. "The present work," says the author in his preface, "is primarily addressed to those who may find a philosophical interest in understanding the place and value of beauty in the system of human life, as conceived by leading thinkers in different periods of the world's history." There can be no doubt of the inadequacy of the previous literature in English upon this branch of historical study. As to the satisfaction to be derived from the present volume by students of the subject, much must, of course, depend upon the author's success, first, in defining the place and business of æsthetic theory, and second, in deciding upon a good method of dealing with the history of this theory.

As a fact, it is with small interest that one studies æsthetic theories, unless he himself has a pretty well-defined notion of what he wants an æsthetic theory to do for him; while to have such a notion is already to possess a pretty definite concern which will guide one's whole study. It is useless for me to read answers to the questions that I do not ask myself. A man's taste may differ widely from mine; it may be far too deep or well trained for my present comprehension; or it may embody a vastly different temperament from my own: yet I may, at every turn, have to learn from his experience when he expresses his immediate sense of fondness for this or that concrete work of art. But what he reflectively says in the form of a theory concerning the nature of his artistic consciousness will mean little to me unless his theoretical curiosity takes a shape that I regard as important. Is æsthetic theory a branch of metaphysic, or of psychology? Is its purpose to tell me what is the ultimate real nature of an objective truth called the beautiful? Or is its intent to give me an account of how individual men come by their personal ideas of beauty? Or, thirdly, is it neither of these things, but rather a series of inductive generalizations concerning the characteristics which, as a fact, are found to be present and effective in the various types of great works of art that have come into existence? In other words, is æsthetic doctrine nothing but a sort of generalized criticism, — a collection and systematization of what the critics of individual works or special departments of art have made out? These questions are important preliminaries to every discussion of æsthetic theory, or of its history. A history of criticism would be one thing, and would appeal to a certain definite interest in many students. A history of metaphysical æsthetic doctrines would be another thing. A history of æsthetic psychology

would be still a third thing. The method of procedure, the class of readers to be interested, the questions to be faced, the relation of the work to the more concrete history of art itself, would be very different in these various cases. It is, of course, possible to combine all three undertakings in one book, but it is well to keep them always sundered in one's mind as one proceeds.

Our author has not quite sufficiently faced (so the present reviewer feels) these alternatives in their true distinctness. Yet they are of a sort not at all uncommon when we begin to study philosophy. To take a parallel case: There is such a thing as the science of physics. There is such a thing as the philosophy of nature, which deals with the metaphysical problems that lie at the basis of the concepts of physics. There is, thirdly, such a thing as the psychology of our belief in the external world. These three doctrines are, indeed, in the eyes of the wise, very genuinely related, but they are still separate undertakings of our finite thought; and no one of them does well to trespass on the other's realm, however much they may cooperate. Even their history may well be treated with considerable independence. Roughly corresponding to the exact empirical science of physics, there is also a very inexact body of doctrine that may be called by the name of art-criticism. This body of doctrine, highly empirical and changeable in content, has a very complex history, but a very important one; since what men have from time to time thought about the art of their day, and of former days, throws an important light on the whole history of culture. Corresponding to the philosophy of nature there is also a purely philosophical æsthetic. Corresponding to the psychology of our ideas of the external world, there is the psychology of our artistic consciousness. Were it not better more sharply to sunder these undertakings? "Wenn Ihr im Suchen euch trennt, erst wird die Wahrheit erkannt."

What Mr. Bosanquet gives us in this book is (1) a very scholarly and often admirable account of the most important metaphysical theories of the beautiful; (2) joined herewith, in a fashion that we feel to be unequal, and often whimsical, a sketch of selected examples of doctrine illustrating the history of art-criticism and of the artistic consciousness generally; (3) a decidedly inadequate discussion of the history of the still infant doctrine of the psychology of the artistic consciousness. The present reviewer has the feeling that, had Mr. Bosanquet more sharply distinguished these natural divisions of his subject, he would have been less unequal in his use of the literature of art-criticism, more just to the relative importance of psychological æsthetics, and not less mindful than he very rightly is of the organic connectedness of all human consciousness concerning art. To divide for the ends of science is not to forget relationships, but rather to clarify them.

It is proper to say, however, that Mr. Bosanquet's literary unity is a very deliberately chosen one, that he has given many of his own reasons

for it as he has proceeded on his way, and that the present reviewer, writing as a student of philosophy, and not as a student of art, feels no right, in this field, to be at all dogmatic. The question is merely one of ideals and of general plans. Our author's competence and scholarship in dealing with his selected material are everywhere manifest. As to his own announced plan, it runs thus: "Æsthetic means philosophy of the beautiful" (p. 1). The subject-matter of this book is therefore "the succession of systematic theories by which philosophers have attempted to explain or connect together the facts that relate to beauty." But this history cannot be divorced from the history of fine art itself. This is especially true in case of the history of æsthetic, because the objects of which the artistic consciousness of any age is aware "have an importance which rather increases than diminishes as the ages go by. Thus when we attempt the task of tracing the æsthetic consciousness through the stages of its development, we have before us a concrete material not of mere antiquarian interest, but constituting a large proportion of what is valued for its own sake in the surroundings of our present life" (p. 2). In the recent literature of the subject, as the author tells us (p. 394; cf. p. 414 on Schasler's "Critical History of Æsthetic," and p. 429 on von Hartmann's historical treatment of æsthetic doctrines), the history of art and the history of the philosophical views about art have been treated too much in separation from one another. "The present writer" (p. 394) "has attempted to bend back the line of historical inquiry towards the evolution of beauty as an objective though mental phenomenon, and away from the mere affiliation of philosophical opinions." Accordingly, the whole study is based on the contrast between the consciousness of the beautiful prevalent in antiquity and the more modern forms of the artistic consciousness whose rise is mainly due to Christianity (p. 4, pp. 111-115, chapter vi. *passim*, chapter viii. pp. 171-175). The Greek æsthetic consciousness is discussed in general, and in connection with the philosophical theories from Socrates to Plotinus, in chapters ii.-v. Chapter vi. deals with "Some Traces of the Continuity of the Æsthetic Consciousness throughout the Middle Ages," and is accordingly of an extremely varied character. Chapter vii. is a somewhat unexpected essay entitled "A Comparison of Dante and Shakespeare in Respect of Some Formal Characteristics," — a paper as ingenious as it is of doubtful bearing upon the purpose of this book. Chapter viii. states "The Problem of Modern Æsthetic Philosophy," and briefly sketches the relevant philosophical views of Leibniz, Shaftesbury, Hume and Baumgarten. Chapter ix., entitled "The Data of Modern Æsthetic Philosophy," is largely taken up with selections from the history of art-criticism in the period immediately before the rise of modern æsthetic philosophy. Here one finds a pretty extended discussion of both Lessing and Winckelmann. Herder, mentioned on page 252, is nowhere treated at length, or rated at his just significance as an inspiring and influential literary critic, although

his rights are probably as good as those of Winckelmann. Chapter x. is devoted to Kant's æsthetic theories. Chapter xi. deals with Schiller's æsthetic essays, and gives a confessedly, and no doubt necessarily, too brief account of Goethe's general views upon the topics in question. Chapter xii. is concerned with Schelling and Hegel. "Hegel's treatment of the Ideal" (p. 342) is, in its technically philosophical aspect, "the greatest single step that has ever been made in æsthetic." Chapter xiii., entitled "'Exact' Æsthetic in Germany," is, to the present reviewer's mind, the most incongruous and unsuccessful chapter of the whole work. Side by side with Schopenhauer's beautiful dream of a mystical æsthetic doctrine stands a brief sketch of Herbart's theory (pp. 368-373), and a longer account of the Herbartian, Zimmermann. The same summary then includes brief accounts of Fechner's and of Stumpf's views on special problems of æsthetic psychology; and thereupon the recent students of the psychology of the artistic consciousness are in general bidden, as it were, to take heed what a poor figure they make under the circumstances. Psychology will, indeed, as we later learn (p. 466), play "a leading part," "in the æsthetic of the future," but Mr. Bosanquet even in this later passage regards psychology as being only a "necessary pendant" to a more philosophical investigation. Yet psychology is no "necessary pendant," but an empirical investigation by itself, as free from the trammels of any reflective philosophical theory as astronomy is free from giving any heed to Kant's Deduction of the Categories, and free in precisely the same sense. So he who inquires into the psychological mechanism whereby individuals have come by their artistic joys, is pursuing an inquiry that does not lie "within" the region which "Objective Idealism" very rightly looks upon as its own; and the present reviewer, as himself an "objective idealist" must venture to wonder at Mr. Bosanquet's apparent misunderstanding of the psychologist's position. Chapter xiv., on the "Methodical Completion of Objective Idealism," deals with Rosenkranz, Carrière, Schasler and von Hartmann, with references to Solger, Weisse and Vischer. Chapter xv., in a very interesting way, brings the discussion back to English ground, draws together the threads of the argument, and closes with an outlook into the future.

As to his own æsthetic theory, Mr. Bosanquet defines the beautiful on page 5 in terms so abstract as to ensure considerable questioning in some readers' minds. He gives the same thought expression again and again in the course of his book, and almost always in simpler terms than in this first passage (cf., for example, the passages pp. 173, 283, 430, 463). When something rational, deep, true, significant, is directly, immediately, obviously, expressed to sense, in forms consistent with the nature of the medium of the expression, then we have something beautiful. The Greek theories laid stress upon the formal conditions of the expression in any medium ("unity in variety," etc.). The modern mind has come to

lay more stress upon the depth or "characteristic" nature of what is expressed. The unfolding of this conception of the "characteristic" is the true philosophy of the beautiful.

This is no place to enter into discussion of the issues thus suggested. It is enough to have indicated our author's scope, and the reasons why, to the present reviewer's mind, the book remains unnecessarily fragmentary and unequal in its method of work. If art-criticism is to have so important a place amongst the "Data of Modern Æsthetic," why, then, should France have so little place in one's discussion of the literature of the subject? If the "Philosophy of the Beautiful" is the sole principal topic of the book, why, then, are the researches of recent psychologists treated as if it were the fault of psychology that they are, after all, only empirical researches? If the history of Æsthetic has to be treated in close relation to the history of Art, why is the relation developed in such an unequal and even, at times, almost capricious fashion? Such questions *will* arise as one reads.

Yet, after all, these are perhaps but the incidents of an undertaking relatively novel, and surely enormously difficult, for the execution of which we must, despite all questions or objections, deeply thank our learned guide through these peculiarly obscure pathways of philosophical Æsthetic. The book is one of the most thoughtful industry.

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